

WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:

1 1. An electronic lock and money control system comprising:
2 at least one safe comprising:
3 a housing having an interior compartment for securing money, and
4 an outer door having an electronic lock mechanism to control access to the interior
5 compartment;
6 a data input device;
7 an electronic display;
8 a connector interface mounted to the housing; and
9 a control system arranged to communicate with the data input device,
10 electronic display, connector interface and electronic lock mechanism, wherein the
11 control system includes a processor programmed to control operation of the
12 electronic lock, as well as operate as a central system controller when connected
13 to at least one other remote safe via the connector interface to monitor and
14 accumulate financial and operational information for each remote unit.

1 2. The system of claim 1 wherein the at least one safe further
2 comprises a bill validator apparatus mounted to the housing for receiving and
3 validating bills of various denominations, and a storage device located within the
4 safe for storing all validated bills, wherein the processor is programmed to maintain
5 a record of all received and validated bills.

1 3. The system of claim 1 further comprising a cash dispensing
2 apparatus mounted to the housing, the cash dispensing apparatus including a set of
3 openings in the housing arranged to be loaded with containers each containing
4 money of a predetermined value, and a separate opening and dispensing tray in the
5 housing to dispense money containers for removal from the safe.

1 4. The system of claim 1 wherein the control system is further
2 programmed to accumulate and track deposits and withdrawals of money, recognize
3 user identification data, and store transaction data and associated user identity data

4 in a memory; wherein the processor is further arranged to process and sort stored
5 transaction and operational data to generate an audit report and accounting reports.

1 5. The system of claim 1 wherein a remote safe unit is connected
2 to the connector interface, the remote safe unit comprising a bill validator apparatus
3 mounted to a housing thereof for receiving and validating bills of various
4 denominations, and a storage device located within the remote safe for storing all
5 validated bills, wherein the processor is programmed to maintain a record of all
6 bills received and validated in the remote safe.

1 6. The system of claim 1 wherein the connection interface
2 comprises a communications port to allow communication between the control
3 system and a remote computer.

1 7. The system of claim 1 wherein a remote safe unit is connected
2 to the connector interface, the remote safe unit comprising a cash dispensing
3 apparatus mounted to a housing thereof, the cash dispensing apparatus including a
4 set of openings in the housing arranged to be loaded with containers each containing
5 money of a predetermined value, and a separate opening and dispensing tray in the
6 housing to dispense cash containers for removal from the safe, wherein the
7 processor is programmed to maintain a record of all money load and dispensed from
8 the remote safe.

1 8. The system of claim 1 wherein the processor is programmed
2 to recognize different levels of user system access authority.

1 9. The system of claim 1 wherein one or more remote safe units
2 are connected to the connector interface, and the processor is further programmed
3 to accumulate and track deposits and withdrawals of money, recognize user
4 identification data, and store transaction data and associated user identity data in a
5 memory for each remote unit, wherein the processor is arranged to process and sort
6 stored transaction and operational data to generate an individual and totaled audit
7 and accounting reports.

1 10. The system of claim 9 wherein the processor is arranged to
2 selectively generate financial reports including individual user reports, cash showing
3 actual cash present by location, and end day reports, as well as an audit report
4 itemizing the occurrence of selected events during a specific time period.

1 11. A network of interconnected electronic locking and money
2 control devices comprising:

3 a central processing system integrated with one of the electronic
4 locking and money control devices and arranged to control operation of the
5 integrated device, wherein the central processing system is connected to all other
6 network devices, and further arranged to communicate with all the other network
7 devices and provide network control of all the other devices.

1 12. The network of claim 11 wherein the central processing
2 system is arranged to automatically detect and assign network addresses for devices
3 added to the network.

1 13. The network of claim 11 wherein the other network devices
2 comprise a data entry subsystem arranged to receive and recognize user
3 identification data, and transmit the data to the central processing system, wherein
4 the central processing system is arranged to determine whether the user is
5 authorized to access the system, and controlling operation of the network device
6 based on the authorization determination.

1 14. The network of claim 11 wherein the data entry system is
2 arranged to receive the user identification data in the form of at least a user number,
3 electronic key, or biometric identification.

1 15. The network of claim 11 wherein a network device comprises
2 an electronic lock and control arrangement.

1 16. The network of claim 11 wherein a network device is a cash
2 dispensing apparatus, the cash dispensing apparatus including a set of openings
3 arranged to be loaded with containers each containing cash of a predetermined
4 value, and a separate opening and dispenser to dispense cash containers for removal
5 from the safe, wherein the cash dispensing apparatus is arranged to maintain an
6 accounting of all containers and provide a report to the central processing system.

1 17. The network of claim 11 wherein a network device comprises
2 a universal interface designed to communicate with a plurality of types of bill
3 validators arranged to receive and validate bills of various denominations, and a
4 storage device for storing all validated bills, wherein the universal interface is
5 programmed to maintain a record of all received and validated bills and provide a
6 report to the central processing system.

1 18. The network of claim 11 wherein the central processing
2 system is fully programmable via a data entry subsystem arranged to receive and
3 recognize user identification data, and transmit the data to the central processing
4 system.

1 19. The network of claim 11 wherein the central processing
2 system is programmed to recognize different levels of user system access authority.

1 20. The network of claim 19 wherein the central processing
2 system is programmed to recognize a level of user system access authority as a
3 function of time or date.

1 21. The network of claim 11 wherein the central processing
2 system is programmed to assign selected devices to an access group to provide
3 flexible levels of user access.

1 22. The network of claim 11 wherein the central processing
2 system is programmed to accumulate and track deposits and withdrawals of money
3 from all devices on the network, recognize user identification data, and store

4 transaction data and associated user identity data in a memory for each device
5 connected to the network, wherein the central processing system is arranged to
6 process and sort stored transaction and operational data to generate an individual
7 and totaled audit and accounting reports.

1 23. The network of claim 11 wherein the central processing
2 system is programmed to develop entities of money that comprise one or more of
3 the devices connected to the network and process the developed entities as a single
4 device for access and accounting purposes, while also being able to track each
5 device separately.

1 24. The network of claim 23 wherein the central processing
2 system is programmed such that entities of money may comprise other entities of
3 money as well as one or more of the devices on the network or remote sub-networks
4 and treat them as one for access and accounting purposes, without losing the ability
5 to track each entity of money or device separately if needed.

1 25. The network of claims 11 wherein the central processing
2 system is arranged to selectively generate financial reports including individual user
3 reports, a cash report showing actual cash present by location, and end-day reports,
4 as well as an audit report itemizing the occurrence of selected events during a
5 specific time period.

1 26 The network of claim 11 wherein each device connected to
2 the network is arranged to store individual configuration information, monetary
3 totals and a selected audit information to facilitate replacement of the central
4 processing system.